THE CONSTANT

A Theory of Elite Power, Belief, and the Architecture of Compliance

EPD Analytical Framework · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

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I. ONE QUESTION BENEATH ALL THE OTHERS

Look at any human civilization that has produced a written record. Ancient Mesopotamia. Imperial China. Feudal Europe. Colonial Africa. The Soviet Union. The contemporary liberal democracy. Despite everything that separates these societies — language, religion, technology, geography, political vocabulary — they all share one structural feature: a small group of people who produce very little consume a vastly disproportionate share of what a large group of people who produce everything actually make. The Pharaoh does not farm. The feudal lord does not plow. The colonial administrator does not mine. The shareholder does not manufacture. The political commissar does not build. The surplus moves upward, from the many who generate it to the few who consume it, through whatever institutional channels the specific society has developed to accomplish the transfer.

This is not an ideological observation. It is an arithmetic one. In any society that produces more than what its members minimally need to survive — any society with surplus — the question of who consumes the surplus is a political question, answered by whoever controls organized force. The arrangement is not natural in the sense that rocks fall and the sun rises. It is constructed, maintained, and defended. And it is everywhere. Not in some societies. Not in exploitative or backward societies. Everywhere, across every civilization type the historical record contains.

The EPD framework — Elite Power Dynamics — was built to understand how this arrangement works. Not to condemn it or celebrate it. To understand the mechanisms through which a small number of ordinary people maintain control over a large number of ordinary people across every variety of political and economic arrangement human beings have ever constructed. The framework's case study series has examined ancient empires, feudal hierarchies, colonial administrations, early modern states, and contemporary institutional systems. The specific mechanisms vary. The underlying dynamic is constant.

This paper is the framework's capstone statement: the most general account it can give of what that constant dynamic is, why it takes the form it does, and what maintains it across every civilization type that has ever existed. It is written to stand alone — the

reader does not need prior knowledge of the framework's other papers to follow the argument. It draws on examples from across the historical and contemporary record, but the argument it makes is structural rather than historical. It is not a claim about specific societies. It is a claim about the logic that every society producing a surplus must eventually confront.

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II. THE ARITHMETIC PROBLEM

Start with the numbers. In any governing system the historical record contains, the governing class is vastly outnumbered by the governed. The ratio is rarely less than a hundred to one and is frequently a thousand to one or more. The British Indian Civil Service — which governed approximately 300 million people across the Indian subcontinent at its height — numbered approximately 1,200 members. The entire apparatus of colonial administrators, military officers, and senior officials who maintained European dominance across Africa in the late nineteenth century was measured in the thousands. The apartheid government's white population, maintaining control over a Black majority approximately four times its size, was approximately five million people in a country of twenty-two million. These are not anomalies. They are the structure of governing power.

The arithmetic creates the governing elite's fundamental problem. Force can establish an arrangement. It cannot sustain one cheaply at scale. A governing apparatus that relies on continuous direct coercion — a soldier behind every worker, a guard at every corner, a monitor in every household — must employ more enforcers than the surplus it is extracting can sustainably fund. The enforcement cost exceeds the extraction benefit. The arrangement becomes self-defeating.

Every governing system in the historical record has solved this problem in the same basic way: by making the governed population enforce its own subordination. When the arrangement is maintained primarily by the governed population's own behavior — their compliance, their self-censorship, their policing of each other, their defense of the system against those who would challenge it — the governing elite's enforcement cost approaches zero. Force can be reserved for the margins, deployed selectively against the specific cases the self-policing system cannot handle. Everything else runs for free.

The question this paper addresses is how the governing apparatus gets the governed population to police itself on behalf of an arrangement that extracts from the governed population for the governing elite's benefit. The answer requires understanding two instruments that every governing system must deploy simultaneously, and the specific relationship between them.

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III. THE TWO INSTRUMENTS

The governing apparatus has two instruments available for maintaining its position: organized force and organized belief. Every governing system uses both. The relationship between them determines the system's cost, stability, and durability.

Force

Organized force is the indispensable foundation. Without the capacity to apply overwhelming violence selectively, no governing arrangement survives. Force is what establishes the arrangement at the founding, what maintains it when belief fails, and what defends it at the margins against the organized challenges that every governing system eventually faces. Force is the bedrock.

But force has specific limitations that make it insufficient as a governing instrument on its own. It is expensive: soldiers, weapons, surveillance infrastructure, prison systems, and enforcement mechanisms all consume the surplus the governing arrangement is trying to extract. It is visible: force applied in public generates witnesses, and witnesses generate solidarity responses in populations that observe others being subjected to what they can recognize as unjust treatment. It is selective in its reach: force can be in some places at some times, not everywhere at all times. And it is morally costly: a governing arrangement that rests openly on nothing but its capacity for violence cannot generate the willing cooperation that productive economies require. The governed population must show up, perform labor, pay taxes, and participate in the institutional systems that make the extraction possible. A population that is exclusively coerced will do the minimum required to avoid punishment and no more. That minimum is often insufficient for the governing elite's needs.

Force establishes. It cannot sustain cheaply. Something else is required.

Belief

Organized belief is the governing apparatus's solution to force's limitations. When the governed population genuinely believes that the arrangement is natural, right, divinely ordained, scientifically determined, or simply the way things have always been and must be, it cooperates with the arrangement not because it is compelled but because it understands itself to be acting correctly. The laborer shows up not because a soldier is watching but because showing up is what responsible people do. The taxpayer pays not because the tax collector is armed but because paying taxes is what good citizens do. The community member reports the nonconformist not because they were instructed to but because protecting the community from deviance is what moral people do.

This is belief's governing function: it converts coerced compliance into something that feels like consent. The governed population does not experience itself as being managed. It experiences itself as living in accordance with the right order of things. The arrangement is invisible as an arrangement because it has been converted, through the formation process, into the background assumption of everyone's daily experience. It is

not perceived as a political choice that could be made differently. It is perceived as reality.

The most important thing to understand about belief in the governing context is that it is not supplementary to force. It is not the soft version of power that civilized societies use instead of violence. It is the instrument that makes force sustainable, affordable, and acceptable. Belief and force are a system. They work together in ways that make each more powerful than it could be alone, and in ways that together constitute a governing arrangement far more durable than either could produce independently.

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IV. WHAT BELIEF ACTUALLY DOES

Stating that governing systems use belief to maintain themselves is a thin observation. The framework's analytical contribution is the precise account of what belief does in that governing context — the three specific functions it performs that together explain both its power and its necessity.

First Function: Naturalizing the Hierarchy

The governing arrangement's first vulnerability is the obvious question: why does this particular group of people consume what this other particular group of people produces? The arrangement is political — the product of historical force, institutional construction, and continuous maintenance. But if the governed population perceives it as political, they can also perceive it as changeable. Political arrangements are made by people and can be unmade by people. If the arrangement is merely political, it can be contested.

Belief resolves this vulnerability by converting the political into the natural. The specific vocabulary varies with each era's available intellectual framework. In ancient Mesopotamia, the king ruled because the gods had deposited kingship in his city. In medieval Europe, the lord held his position by divine right, God's delegation of authority down through the social hierarchy. In the nineteenth century's colonial period, European dominance was natural because racial science had established the biological hierarchy. In the contemporary market economy, the wealthy are wealthy because competitive markets select for the genuinely capable. In Soviet communism, the party held power because historical materialism had established that the party represented the direction of history.

The specific content changes completely across these eras. The function is identical: convert the political arrangement into an apparent natural fact. Natural facts do not require justification. They do not invite contest. They simply are. The Pharaoh does not argue for his position any more than the sun argues for rising. He is what he is, and questioning it is not political dissent but the violation of a cosmological order. Once the governing arrangement has been naturalized, the burden of proof shifts entirely onto

those who would challenge it. Challenging a natural order requires explaining why reality should be different. Maintaining it requires nothing — it simply continues.

Second Function: Pre-Positioning the Dehumanization

The governing arrangement's second vulnerability is that force, when it must be applied, is visible. People observe other people being subjected to violence and they have a natural solidarity response — they see themselves in the person being harmed and they react with resistance. This solidarity response is the governing apparatus's most dangerous operational problem, because if the governed population responds to every application of force with solidarity and resistance, the governing apparatus's enforcement capacity is rapidly overwhelmed. The arithmetic that makes continuous coercion unsustainable applies here as well: you cannot suppress everyone simultaneously.

The solution is to pre-position the dehumanization. Before force is applied to any specific person or group, the governing narrative has already established the categories of people against whom force is legitimate and the categories in whose name it is applied. The barbarian threatening civilization. The heretic threatening the community's spiritual integrity. The criminal threatening public safety. The class enemy threatening the revolution. The drug addict threatening social order. These categories are not improvised at the moment violence is needed. They are constructed through the governing apparatus's information pipeline over time — through official pronouncements, education systems, media coverage, religious teaching, and cultural production — and installed in the governed population as common sense, as accurate descriptions of certain kinds of people and what those people deserve.

When force is then applied to a person who has been pre-positioned in one of these categories, the solidarity response is dramatically diminished or eliminated. The community member who would otherwise see in the target something of themselves instead sees a member of a category that the belief formation has placed outside or below full human moral status. They do not experience the force as unjust. They experience it as the community's legitimate self-defense. They may actively support it. The governing apparatus has successfully recruited the governed population into the enforcement operation by the simple mechanism of doing the categorization work in advance.

This is why the dehumanization categories are not random. They are not propaganda errors or the prejudices of ignorant people that more enlightened societies would not have. They are functional instruments, calibrated to the governing apparatus's specific enforcement needs. The categories that receive the most sustained construction through the information pipeline are the categories of people whose suppression is most important to the governing elite's maintenance of its position. The elaborateness of the dehumanization architecture documents the governing apparatus's own assessment of its enforcement requirements.

Third Function: Producing Self-Policing

The belief formation's most efficient governing product is a population that polices itself and each other without instruction, payment, or awareness that policing is what is happening. When the governing narrative has been sufficiently internalized — when it has become not a claim that the governed population was told and evaluated but the background assumption of their daily experience — compliance is no longer coerced. It is motivated by genuine conviction.

The true believer — the person formed so thoroughly within the governing narrative that they experience it as reality rather than as a framework — monitors their own behavior against the narrative's requirements and adjusts it without external instruction. They apply social pressure to those around them whose behavior deviates from the requirements. They report, ostracize, attack, or simply withhold support from those who violate the governing system's rules. In each case, they experience this not as enforcement of the elite's interests but as moral behavior, community defense, the natural response of a decent person to the threat that deviance poses.

The governing elite does not direct this self-policing. It does not pay for it. It does not even need to be aware of it in detail. The formation process has outsourced enforcement to the governed population itself. The governing apparatus's direct enforcement capacity is now needed only at the margin: for the organized factions that the self-policing system cannot suppress, for the charismatic counter-narrative producers whose challenge threatens the formation itself, for the resistant communities that have not been fully formed into the narrative's framework. Everything else — the everyday maintenance of the arrangement's conditions — runs for free, powered by the genuine convictions of the people it controls.

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V. HOW THE SYSTEM IS BUILT

Understanding what the governing arrangement does in its mature, stable operation requires understanding how it got there — the sequence through which a new governing system converts a population from externally coerced to genuinely formed. The sequence is consistent across independent historical contexts that had no contact with each other, which is itself evidence that the sequence is generated by structural logic rather than cultural transmission.

Stage One: The Founding Coalition and the Sword

Every durable governing system begins with organized violence or its credible threat. A founding coalition — a small group bound by shared interest in the system's success — seizes power through force. There is no route around this. The previous occupants of the governing position will not relinquish it voluntarily. The population that will be governed has not yet been brought inside the new system's framework and has no reason to accept the new arrangement as legitimate.

The founding coalition understands, at least functionally, what it is doing. Its members may believe sincerely in the narrative they are constructing — the genuinely devoted religious founder, the sincere revolutionary, the true nationalist — or they may be primarily calculating. The distinction matters less than the framework suggests, because the functional behavior is similar in either case. The narrative is deployed where it is useful and adjusted when it is not. The legal and institutional framework that emerges from the founding encodes the coalition's interests with precision. The provisions enforced most zealously are those whose violation would most directly threaten the coalition's position. The founding coalition is close enough to the system's construction to understand it as a construction, whatever the sincerity of their beliefs in other respects.

In this first stage, compliance is primarily coerced. The governing apparatus kills those who resist at sufficient scale that resistance becomes prohibitively expensive for most of the population. This is not hidden in the historical record. It is the explicit mechanism of political founding, documented in the primary sources of every major governing system's establishment.

Stage Two: The Rational Calculators

The sword creates the first category of nominal compliance: the rational calculators. These are intelligent actors who observe the founding violence, assess the costs of continued resistance against the costs of compliance, and make a clear-eyed decision to submit. Their submission is not belief. It is rational behavior under demonstrated threat. They know exactly what the arrangement is. They have calculated that accepting it is less costly than opposing it.

The rational calculators are the governing system's most honest participants and its most unstable constituency. Their compliance is contingent — it holds only as long as the cost calculation remains favorable. If the governing system's credibility of force diminishes, if an organized alternative faction with sufficient resources appears, the rational calculators will recalculate. Every successful governing system therefore treats this phase as temporary. A system whose population is primarily composed of rational calculators is a system that must maintain continuous expensive force or face defection at the first opportunity. It needs to produce believers.

Stage Three: The True Believers

The true believers are the governing system's most valuable long-term product. They are members of the governed population who have genuinely internalized the governing narrative — who do not experience it as a claim they were told and evaluated but as the actual structure of reality. Their compliance is not strategic. It is a feature of who they are. Challenging the governing narrative does not feel to them like an invitation to intellectual inquiry. It feels like an attack on reality itself and, at a deeper level, an attack on the self that was constructed through that reality's acceptance.

True believers are produced by formation, not by persuasion. The governing system constructs the institutional environment in which children develop: the educational system, the religious institutions, the family structure, the legal framework, the cultural practices, the media, the stories the community tells about itself. In that environment, the governing narrative is the background assumption of every developmental experience. The child raised within it does not encounter the narrative as a claim being made to them. They encounter it as the way things are. By the time they are adults capable of reflecting on it, it is so thoroughly embedded in their understanding of reality that the reflection itself happens inside the framework rather than outside it.

This is the mechanism's most important feature: when formation has been sufficiently deep, the governing narrative becomes identity. Not something the true believer believes, but something the true believer is. The self was constructed through the narrative's acceptance. Challenging the narrative therefore threatens the self. This is why challenges to deeply held governing narratives produce such intense emotional responses — hostility, outrage, the refusal of engagement that looks from the outside like irrationality or intellectual dishonesty. It is neither. It is the entirely rational response of a person defending their self against what they correctly perceive as an existential attack. The formation worked.

Stage Four: Self-Policing Without Instructions

Once a critical mass of true believers exists, the governing system undergoes a qualitative transformation. The expensive coercive infrastructure of the founding phase is no longer necessary for routine maintenance. The self-policing system is operational: the governed population monitors itself, enforces the narrative's requirements on itself and on each other, and applies social, legal, and in some cases physical sanctions to nonconformity — all without direction from the governing elite, all experienced by its participants as moral behavior rather than as enforcement on behalf of someone else's interests.

The governing elite's role in this mature phase is maintenance rather than enforcement: maintaining the institutional environment that continues to produce true believers through formation, selectively applying force at the margin for the cases the self-policing system cannot handle, and managing the information environment to prevent the counter-narratives that could disrupt the formation process from reaching the governed population at sufficient scale. Everything else runs on the formation's momentum. The arrangement has become cheap.

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VI. THE HIDDEN DESIGN

The system's most important operational requirement is also its most fragile one: the arrangement must not be visible as an arrangement.

This is not simply a tactical preference. It is a structural necessity. The moment the governing arrangement becomes visible to the governed population as a constructed arrangement — the moment they can see that the naturalized hierarchy is political rather than natural, that the dehumanization categories are instruments of elite control rather than accurate moral descriptions, that their self-policing is enforcement on behalf of someone else's interests rather than the community's self-defense — the belief stops working. The formation's product is genuine belief that is not experienced as belief. The moment it is experienced as belief — as a claim that was made to them, that they could choose to evaluate and potentially reject — the governing apparatus loses its most efficient instrument. It is thrown back on expensive direct force. The arrangement becomes unsustainable.

This is why the governing apparatus's information management system is not a peripheral component of governing but a central one. Managing what the governed population receives, in what sequence, through what channels, and with what framing is the governing apparatus's continuous core operation. The dehumanization categories must be pre-positioned before force is applied so that force is not perceived as elite self-interest but as community defense. The counter-information that would make the arrangement visible as an arrangement must be suppressed, discredited, or framed as the product of enemies rather than as accurate description. The governing elite's own internal communications — where the arrangement is discussed as an arrangement, where material interests are calculated openly — must be separated from the public communication through which the narrative is maintained.

The arrangement's hiddenness is what makes the concept of "false consciousness" analytically inadequate as a description of what is happening. False consciousness implies that the governed population has beliefs that are false and that it would benefit from recognizing as false. But the governed population's beliefs are not false in the sense of being poorly reasoned or based on insufficient evidence. They are the product of a formation process that was designed to produce exactly those beliefs, operating through institutional channels that the governed population had no reason to distrust, reinforced by every social relationship and cultural experience of their lives. Their beliefs are real. Their experience of reality is genuine. The formation was done to them, not by them, and the formation's purpose was someone else's maintenance of a position of material advantage, not the governed population's flourishing.

What is false is not the belief itself but the account of where the belief came from. The true believer experiences their beliefs as self-evident reality. They are formation. The difference between those two accounts of the same mental state is the difference between a person freely inhabiting their perception and a person inhabiting a perception that was constructed for them. The governed population did not reason its way to the conclusion that the hierarchy is natural. It was formed into that conclusion before it had the conceptual tools to evaluate it. This is not a moral failure of the governed. It is the governing apparatus's most efficient achievement.

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VII. WHY IT IS UNIVERSAL

The framework's most important single claim is also its most counterintuitive: the dynamic described in this paper is not a feature of capitalism, feudalism, colonialism, or any other specific economic or political form. It is a universal feature of organized human societies with surplus above subsistence. It appears in ancient Mesopotamian theocracies, medieval European feudalism, nineteenth-century colonial empires, twentieth-century communist states, and contemporary liberal democracies. The specific vocabulary changes entirely across these contexts. The underlying dynamic is constant.

The evidence for universality is the convergence of solutions across independent historical contexts. The Roman veteran-settler system, the Ptolemaic cleruchy, the Norman plantation in England, and the Ulster Plantation in Ireland all arrived independently at the same structural solution to the same structural problem — how does a small elite maintain control over a large territory — without any of them copying the others. The divine-mandate claim appears in Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Chinese, Mesoamerican, and European governing systems that had no historical contact. The dehumanization apparatus appears in every colonial and imperial system in the historical record, in every ideological revolution, in every ethnic or religious conflict that has been used to justify the application of governing force against a specific population.

This convergence is the strongest available evidence that the dynamic is generated by structural logic rather than cultural inheritance. The same arithmetic — small elite, large governed population, surplus to be extracted — operating on the same basic toolkit — organized force, institutional construction, information management — produces the same structural solutions regardless of the specific culture, religion, language, or time period of the actors involved. The dynamic is the constant. The specific forms are variables.

The communist state illustrates this most cleanly, because communist theory explicitly denied the dynamic's relevance to socialist governance. The state, in Marxist theory, was an instrument of class oppression that would wither away as class society was transcended. What actually happened in every communist state that existed long enough to develop a stable governing structure was the emergence of a governing class — the party apparatus, the security services, the senior military and administrative cadre — that consumed a disproportionate share of the social product, maintained power through organized force, constructed a legitimating narrative (historical materialism, the vanguard party, the inevitable direction of history) that naturalized their position, and suppressed challenge through the same combination of dehumanization (the class enemy, the counter-revolutionary, the traitor) and self-policing (party loyalty, ideological conformity, comrade-against-comrade surveillance) that every other governing system in the record had used. The vocabulary was different. The dynamic was identical.

The liberal democracy illustrates it more subtly, because the liberal democratic framework explicitly committed itself to principles — equal rights, rule of law, democratic accountability — that are in tension with the dynamic's operation. The tension is real,

not cosmetic: liberal democracies have produced genuine expansions of the scope of people included in the moral community, genuine accountability mechanisms that have constrained elite behavior in ways that other governing forms have not, and genuine reductions in the most naked forms of dehumanization. The framework's claim is not that liberal democracy is indistinguishable from tyranny. It is that the underlying dynamic operates within the liberal democratic framework as well, expressed through the specific instruments that the liberal democratic framework makes available: campaign finance structures that give disproportionate governing access to those with disproportionate wealth; information pipeline management through media ownership and regulatory frameworks; dehumanization categories constructed through policing patterns, sentencing structures, and the specific ways that public culture represents certain groups; and self-policing through the internalization of market ideology, meritocratic mythology, and the naturalization of economic inequality as the reflection of genuine differential contribution. The specific instruments are different. The dynamic is the same.

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VIII. THE PROPHYLACTIC ARCHITECTURE

Every governing system that has understood the Four Conditions — whether it named them that or not — has built an architecture to prevent them from assembling simultaneously. The Four Conditions are the preconditions for effective challenge to any governing arrangement: popular fuel (accumulated grievances sufficient to motivate mass action), an organized faction (a group with the capacity to direct popular fuel toward specific political objectives), a belief vehicle (an ideological or spiritual framework that makes sacrifice comprehensible and gives ordinary people a reason to act that transcends personal calculation), and a foreign patron (external support that enables a challenge to sustain itself against the governing apparatus's superior conventional resources).

The governing apparatus's prophylactic architecture is specifically designed to prevent all four from assembling simultaneously. Against the organized faction: restrictions on education, political participation, capital accumulation, and assembly — eliminating the organizational capacity from which a challenging faction could form. Against the belief vehicle: co-optation of the institutional carriers of the most potentially mobilizing beliefs, ensuring that the religious, cultural, and educational institutions through which alternative narratives could circulate remain inside the governing apparatus's control. Against the popular fuel's conversion into organized force: economic extraction calibrated to leave no surplus for political organization, and direct criminalization of political expression. Against the foreign patron: information management in potential patron states, framing the challenge as disorder, terrorism, or illegitimacy rather than as political aspiration.

The prophylactic architecture's elaborateness is itself analytically significant. A governing class that believed the hierarchy was genuinely natural — that the governed population accepted their position because it was right and correct — would not invest

in preventing the organizational, financial, and informational conditions for challenge from assembling. Natural hierarchies are self-sustaining. They do not require legislation to maintain themselves. Every prophylactic mechanism is therefore an implicit acknowledgment that the arrangement it protects is not natural — that without the mechanism, the arrangement might not survive. The governing class knows this. The prophylactic architecture is the governing class's anxiety made visible in institutional form. It is the record of what the governing elite fears, expressed as law.

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IX. THE GOVERNING CLASS KNOWS

The framework's most analytically important proposition about the people at the top of any governing system is this: they are ordinary people who know they are ordinary.

No one is born special. No one channels divine will. No one is the instrument of historical necessity. The people who occupy the apex of governing systems are ordinary human beings who have achieved their position through some combination of inheritance, organized force, strategic calculation, coalition building, and the institutional advantages that their social position provided. Some of them are genuinely brilliant. Some are mediocre. Most are somewhere in between. What none of them are is what the narrative says they are: divinely chosen, racially superior, historically inevitable, competitively selected by the market to be the most capable.

The people at the apex know this, at least functionally, in a way that the governed population generally cannot. They attended the meetings where policy was made before the public rationale was constructed. They know that the theological argument was designed to support a political conclusion reached on other grounds. They know that the racial science was selectively deployed to justify a dispossession already decided upon. They know that the revelation occurred at a politically convenient moment. They know that the legal framework serves specific material interests because they or their predecessors encoded those interests in it. The founding coalition's members understand the arrangement as an arrangement because they built it. Their successors, formed within the arrangement like everyone else, may genuinely believe parts of it — this is the believing ruler problem the framework has documented extensively — but even the most thoroughly formed governing-class member knows things about the arrangement's operation that the governed population cannot know from the receiving end.

This awareness produces the governing elite's most specific and important characteristic: they are acutely aware of the math. They know they are outnumbered. They know they can be killed — governing elites are frequently killed, often by the people closest to them. They know that the arrangement's continuation depends on specific conditions being maintained, specific channels being blocked, specific counter-narratives being suppressed. The prophylactic architecture's sophistication is the direct product of this awareness. The governing elite anticipates and prevents what

it would itself do if positions were reversed — because it knows, from personal experience, what the assembly of organizational capacity, ideological commitment, and material resources can accomplish. It achieved its own position through exactly those means. The prophylactic architecture is designed by people who understand how effective challenge works, because building effective challenge is the skill set that brought them to power.

This is what makes the framework's analysis non-conspiratorial. Conspiracy theories require conscious coordination among a group of people who all know what they are doing and agree to hide it. The dynamic described in this paper does not require that. It requires only that governing institutions have structural properties — control of organized force, control of information channels, legal architectures that concentrate resources upward — that consistently produce extractive outcomes regardless of anyone's intentions. The structure is the explanation. The governing class's members do not need to coordinate around an explicit program of elite maintenance. They need only to occupy the positions within the structure that the structure rewards and to act in the ways the structure incentivizes. The outcome is the same whether the individual actors understand the dynamic or not. Most do not understand it fully. The structure produces it regardless.

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X. WHY IT EVENTUALLY FAILS

The governing arrangement described in this paper is durable. Some instances of it have persisted for centuries. But none has persisted permanently, and the framework's structural analysis explains why permanent persistence is not available. The arrangement contains its own dissolution conditions, built into its operating logic.

The extraction that funds the governing elite continuously replenishes the popular fuel that the prophylactic architecture must continuously manage. Every unit of surplus extracted is a unit that has not reached the person who produced it, and the awareness of that gap — however distorted by the formation, however expressed only in the hidden transcript of private complaint rather than the public transcript of overt challenge — accumulates. The prophylactic architecture manages this accumulation. It does not eliminate it. The fuel builds faster than the architecture can contain it in conditions where the extraction intensifies, the formation's effectiveness weakens, or the information management apparatus faces counter-information it cannot suppress.

The formation process itself produces the material for its own undoing. Restrictions on education produce educated people who resent the restrictions and have acquired the conceptual tools to articulate the resentment. Economic extraction calibrated to prevent surplus accumulation produces exactly the economic grievance that the Four Conditions' popular fuel requires. Dehumanization vocabulary, sustained across generations, eventually encounters the contradictions produced by direct contact between the dehumanized and the dehumanizers — the colonized student who learns

the colonizer's language and uses it to articulate the colonizer's violation of the colonizer's own stated principles. The co-optation of belief vehicle institutional carriers produces alternative institutions outside the co-optation's reach — the underground church, the samizdat network, the informal community organization that the governing apparatus cannot reach without violating the very principles its narrative claims to embody.

The Four Conditions eventually assemble. The historical record is unambiguous on this point: every governing arrangement that has operated long enough has eventually faced a challenge that the prophylactic architecture could not contain. What varies is the timing, the character of the challenge, and the outcome. When the conditions assemble gradually, under sustained pressure against a governing apparatus that retains institutional capacity, the outcome tends toward negotiated transition: the political question resolved in the challenging population's favor while the economic architecture's significant elements are preserved. When the conditions assemble rapidly, under simultaneous pressure from all four converging at once, the outcome tends toward either complete dissolution or prolonged violent contest. In every case, the political reversal — who governs — is achievable within a human lifetime once the conditions fully assemble. The economic reversal — who owns, who accumulates, who inherits the structural advantages that the legal architecture encoded — takes longer and is never complete.

This asymmetry — political change faster than economic change — is the arrangement's most durable product. The governing elite can be displaced from the formal positions of political power while its economic position, encoded in property law, corporate structure, investment patterns, and the accumulated institutional weight of generations of advantage, continues to generate returns. The new governors find themselves administering an economic structure they did not design and cannot easily alter without disrupting the productive capacity on which their own governing depends. The formation inheritance — the organizational cultures, administrative practices, and institutional habits that the previous governing arrangement produced — shapes the new governing apparatus even as it formally repudiates the old one. The political form changes. The structural dynamic reasserts itself in the new form.

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XI. WHAT THIS FRAMEWORK IS FOR

A framework that describes how the few maintain power over the many across every civilization type and every historical period is open to a specific misreading: as a description of an unchangeable condition, a counsel of despair, an argument that nothing can be done because the dynamic is universal and persistent. This paper's concluding section addresses that misreading directly.

The framework is not a counsel of despair. It is a map. Maps do not create the terrain they describe. They make the terrain navigable. A traveler without a map is not more

free than a traveler with one — the traveler without a map is simply more likely to get lost. Understanding the dynamic's mechanisms does not make those mechanisms more powerful. It makes them more legible, which is the precondition for thinking seriously about what can be done about them.

The specific practical implication of the framework's analysis is this: the political reversal is achievable. The Four Conditions assemble. The prophylactic architecture fails. Every governing arrangement in the historical record has eventually been challenged successfully, and the challenge has been most successful when those mounting it understood the specific mechanisms they were working against. The abolitionists who used the American Constitution's own language to argue against slavery understood that the commitment trap — the governing narrative's stated commitments providing the vocabulary for the challenge — was the most effective counter-information strategy available. The anti-colonial movements that deployed the colonizer's own Enlightenment values against the colonial practice understood the same. The civil rights movement that used the Declaration of Independence's language against the Jim Crow system understood it. In each case, the challenge succeeded in the political dimension and produced partial success in the economic dimension — the gap between political and economic reversal is real and the framework is honest about it.

The harder problem is the economic reversal. The legal architecture's effects on wealth distribution, capital accumulation, and institutional advantage persist past the political transition because they are embedded deeply enough in the social fabric to survive the governing apparatus's removal. This is not fatalism. It is the accurate statement of the specific problem that has followed every successful political challenge in the historical record, without exception. Understanding that the economic problem persists after the political problem is resolved is the precondition for designing transitions that address it deliberately rather than discovering it after the fact.

The framework's most important single contribution to the practice of political change is the identification of where the arrangement is most vulnerable: at the commitment trap. Every governing narrative makes commitments about what the arrangement is for, who it serves, and what standards it operates under. The more ambitious the stated commitment — the closer it comes to universal human equality, universal law, universal dignity — the more vulnerable the narrative is to counter-information demonstrating that the commitment is violated. The challenge that uses the governing narrative's own vocabulary to show the gap between stated commitment and actual practice does not require the governed population to adopt new values or abandon existing ones. It shows them that their own values, the values the governing narrative gave them, are being violated by the governing apparatus. That demonstration — made in the right vocabulary, to the right audience, at the right moment — is the most powerful political instrument the historical record contains.

The arrangement is not permanent. The dynamic is constant. Those two propositions exist simultaneously, without contradiction. The dynamic generates the arrangement, and the arrangement contains the conditions of its own eventual failure. Understanding both — the dynamic's persistence and the arrangement's vulnerability — is the beginning of serious political thought rather than the end of it.

Elites are just people. Ordinary human beings, managing a structural problem with the tools available to them, reaching for solutions that the problem's logic generates, building the maintenance apparatus that keeping those solutions in place requires. The sophistication of what they build reflects not their special qualities but their acute awareness of their own contingency. When the arrangement is seen clearly — when the naturalized hierarchy is recognized as political, the dehumanization categories as instruments, the self-policing as enforcement, the whole hidden design as a design — the first condition of changing it has been met. Not the only condition. The first one. Accurate understanding of how power actually works is the precondition for thinking seriously about what a different arrangement might look like, and whether and how it could be achieved.

That is what this framework is for.

* * *

The Constant · EPD Analytical Framework · Thomas J. Bryan with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

P.S. That's about as good as I can do to explain what I see. I do not have the education nor vocabulary to write out my thoughts, I need to rely on Claude. In my view this is how power works, how they "pull it off". The other paper "The Exploit, Human Cognitive Architecture and the Permanent Vulnerability to Elite Capture" is why (I think) they can pull it off. The the human brain can be "hacked" , that it has an "exploit". So, if we are ever going to get out from underneath this structural situation, we need to deal with the dynamics of power (my thoughts on the dynamics are this paper "The Constant") and the cognitive architecture of the human brain that isn't going to change (which is in the "The Exploit, Human Cognitive Architecture and the Permanent Vulnerability to Elite Capture" paper). Any thoughts of a systematic change in the dynamics of how the few control the many without dealing with those 2 dynamics, isnt going to work(at least in my opinion).

If you are a Christian, I don't mean to offend you but the Rapture isn't coming. Christians think you don't have to do anything, that eventually Armegeddon happens and afterwards there will be Heaven on Earth.

If you are a Marxist, I don't mean to offend you but Communist Utopia isn't going to happen. Marxists think you don't have to do anything, that eventually the proletariet will rise up in a great revolution and afterwards there will be a Communist Utopia.

Marxists either don't do anything, don't try to improve institutions because they believe it forestalls the coming of the Communist Utopia. Or they try to hasten the coming Utopia by attempting to destroy capitalist institutions/states.

Just beware of the Vanguard Party. The Vanguard Party is like me saying "See, I understand elite power dynamics. I can see the ruling elite everywhere. You aren't smart enough to understand what I understand. Therefore, just kill everyone I tell you to. Once all the killing is

done, then you will have your Utopia. Don’t argue with me or not comply. That’s what the elites want, to divide us. You must kill whoever I say as soon as I say it. It is the only way. Kill everyone I tell you to, I know who the bad people are”. Do you see the danger in that operation? Do you think it is a good idea to just blindly kill anyone I tell you to kill? In case you haven’t figured it out, it’s a bad idea.

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*This case study is part of the collection *Patterns of Power: Systematic Analysis of Elite Control Mechanisms Across Civilizations**